

FEMINIST PRISON LITERATURE IN THE ARAB WORLD:

SAMAR AL-MUQRIN'S NOVEL *NIS AL-MUNKAR/ WOMEN OF EVIL* AS A SAMPLE

LINA SH. HISHMEH

Ph.D, The Academic Arab College for Education in Israel-Haifa, the David Yellin Academic College of Education- Jerusalem

ABSTRACT

The Arab Woman Lives in Her Patriarchal Society as a Prisoner Behind Moral Bars, Deprived of Her Freedom and Rights. She is Likely to Enter The Real Prison if She Penetrates One of the Pillars of the 'forbidden Trinity: Politics Religion and Sex. This Study Deals with the Issue of the Feminist Prison Literature, In Which The Woman Integrates Her Own Concerns With Her General Social, Political And Religious Concerns, Where the Prison Appears in Several Physical and Moral Images, And Thus, Her Text Appears to be Rebellious Against all Kinds of Censorships and Taboos of the Forbidden Trinity.

The Study Starts with the Prison Literature in General and Reaches the Points of Correlation Between Prison Literature and Feminist Literature, Which I Call Feminist Prison Literature. To Achieve its Goal, the Study Chooses The Novel Nis Al-Munkar/ Women of Evil(2008) by the Saudi Arabian Woman Writer Samar Al-Muqrin as a Sample for this Non-Literary Genre, Where the Writer Exposes the Repressive Manifestations That the Woman is Exposed to in Her Conservative Gulf Society, And Her Retribution by the Prison in and its Metaphorical and Physical Bars, Revealing in that the Features of the Images of Her Jailor and His Oppression. In Return, The Study Reveals the Woman's Attempts to Rebel Against These Obstacles in Her Quest for Freedom, And Her Self-Fulfillment and Boldness to Penetrate the Forbidden Trinity.

KEYWORDS: Prison, Prisoner, Jailor, Society, Taboo, Oppression, Politics, Religion & Freedom

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INTRODUCTION

The human movement in the Place is associated with the concept of freedom, "and thus, freedom in this context becomes the total acts that the human being can do without clashing with obstacles that result from an external medium that cannot be overcome"¹. Therefore, and in order for the human being to feel that he belongs to a certain place/ homeland/ society, this place has to protect his freedom, to be safe, intimate and friendly to him. Hence, the place/ homeland/ society, in which the Arab woman lives, fetters her with the forbidden trinity and consequently, she clashes with the obstacles its taboos.

Because the woman is the weakest link in her authoritative patriarchal society, and because she is the one whose freedom is most robbed, and the horizon of the freedom is limited, she is the one who feels most alienated in

¹Qassem, Siza (1988). "al-Mak nwaDal latuhu" in: *Jamaliyat al-Mak n/ Aesthetics of Place*. al-D r al-Baydh : Uyun al-Maqal t, p. 62.

her society. This homeland will turn with the severity of its repression into a "prison" with invisible bars and metaphorical walls; a repulsive and hostile place, which strengthens her feeling of alienation. Alienation in place will inevitably mean a feeling of alienation from one's Self and a threat to her identity.

One of my previous studies about the features of Prison Literature and its themes of the woman writer produced a literary genre that I called "The Feminist Prison Literature".² Therefore, even though this study re-discusses the themes of the Feminist Prison Literature, it intends here to define this literature and other issues that were not dealt with in-depth in the previous study. In order to make this study an applied analytical one, I chose the novel *Nis al-Munkar/ Women of Evil* by Samar al-Muqrin as a representative sample for the Feminist Prison Literature through which the study seeks to give answers to the following questions:

- What are the points of correlation between Prison Literature and Feminist Literature?
- What is the definition of 'Feminist Prison Literature'?
- Why does the novel *Nis al-Munkar* belong to this genre?
- What are the manifestations of the woman's suffering between the 'real prison' and the 'metaphorical prison'?
- To what extent does the man and the patriarchal society and its taboos constitute a metaphorical prison?
- Does the woman dare to break the forbidden trinity of taboos and undermine them?

Correlation of the Prison Literature with the Feminist Prison Literature

Prison Literature is concerned with writings that describe the oppression of the intellectual prisoner and his/her torture behind the walls and bars of the prison. It also reveals its connection with the political and social reality, and the writers' quest for freedom and democracy. It also condemns the methods of persecution that rob the individual of his rights and liberties under strict control and censorship³.

Prison Literature, which is connected to the identity of the prison, is originally related to Place in general. The whole story is summarized in to the place of the prison. However, its particularity lies in its being a closed, repressive and hostile place, which is prepared in advance to exclude the dissenter or offender and rob his freedom. However, the cell or 'dungeon' as a defined place is not the only place of conflict. Essentially, there is no difference between an imprisoned person in a cell and another one who is haunted by horror outside it.

²For more information about Prison Literature, see: al-Sheikh- ishme, Lina (2016). *Adab al-Suj n fi Misr, Syria and Iraq – al- urriyawa al-Raqib*. Haifa: MaktabatKolShay ; al-Sheikh- ishme, Lina (2020). *Adab al-Suj n... MarraOkhra – Dir sa fi al- Adab al-Khalijiy*. Nablus-Amman: Dar al-Sh mel; al-Sheikh- ishme, Lina (2018). "Interconnectivity between Feminist Literature and Prison Literature or Feminist Prison Literature: al-Sharnaqa Novel as a Sample". *International Journal of Language and Literature*. 6/2, December, pp. 59-81; al-Sheikh- ishme, Lina. (2020). "Aesthetics of Place and its Dialectics in Prison Literature". *Journal of Oriental and African Studies*. 29, pp. 7-35.

³see: Peled, Mattityaho (1998). "Prison Literature" in: S. Ballas and R. Snir, (eds.), *Studies in Canonical and Popular Arabic Literature*. Toronto, Ontario: York Press, pp. 69-76; afez, abry. "Torture, Imprisonment, and Political Assassination in the Arab Novel" in: <http://www.aljadid.com/content/torture-imprisonment>.

It is no more strange for the Arab woman writer to write in her feminist fiction⁴ about all the issues of her society, emphasizing her right to deal with any subject, and that she is not less able or less creative than the man. It was only natural that the women writers start expressing the woman's reality, show her suffering, demand her freedom and ask for the change of her society. Finally, they started condemning the man in a way that amounts to bitter satire. In this way, the feminist Arab writer started combining in her literary discourse between her private concerns and the concerns of her homeland. When she became bolder in later decades in her rebellion against political, religious, social restraints and restrictions, she also became bolder in penetrating the forbidden trinity. Since she had a portion of the prison as equal as to the portion of the man and was imprisoned and tortured like him, it was no wonder that she contribute in her writing to the prison literature abundantly.

My previous studies proved that Prison Literature were not exclusive to the man, and they proved that the Arab woman writer was not less able than the man in dealing with this type of writing. In fact, she was not reluctant to reveal her experience or reveal the experiences of others and describe them in a literary text. She would also add to her suffering as a prisoner her sufferings as a persecuted and repressed woman in her society, and would gather her feminist texts in one text under this genre of literature, which I called 'Feminist Prison Literature'. Women writers who contributed to this genre include: Latifa al-Zayyat, Farida al-Naq sh, Khadija Murwazi, Khadeja al-Toumi and Haifa Zankana and many others from different Arab countries⁵.

A text can be classified as a text of Feminist Prison Literature if: the writer is a woman, the prisoner is a woman, and the woman is imprisoned in a real prison because of her penetration of the trinity of the forbidden pillars: politics, religion, sex/ traditions of society and its norms, on condition that this does not disconnect from the writer's feminist discourse. She combines in her single text between the criteria of the prison literature and its pillars: prison, jailor, and the imprisoned woman, and the issues of feminist literature and its presentations, in which she deals with the woman's concerns and her issues, and offers them the central place in the text and the narrative authority.

Because they in this way combine and do not separate, I found out that the combination of the term is also possible, and called it "Feminist Prison Literature". It is the literature in which the woman writer combines between her personal concern and her political, social and religious concern, the prison in this literature turns into various images: physical, metaphorical and moral. Therefore, her literature is expository and rebellious against all taboos.

In addition to that, if the woman writer herself is the one who was imprisoned, and then she revealed her prison-experience in her literary text, the Feminist Literary text intertwines with the General Prison Literature and they identify with each other strongly and to the furthest point under the title 'Feminist Prison Literature'. For example, in the novel al-

⁴For more information about Arab Feminist Literature, see: Saffouri, Mohammad (2011). *Dir sa fi al-Sard al-Niswi al-Arabiya- adith* (1980-2007). Haifa: MaktabatKol Shay';Mu tasseem, Mohammad (2004). *al-Mar'ahwa al-Sard*. al-D r al-Baydh : Dar al-Thaq fa; Cooke, Miriam (1992). "Arab Women Writers" in: M.M. Badawi, (ed.), *Modern Arabic Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 444-462; aha, Ibrahim (2006). "Beware men, They Are ALL Wild Animals", *Arabic Feminist Literature: Challenge, Fight, and Repudiation. al-Carmel*. Haifa: University of Haifa. Vol. 27, pp. 25-71;al-Sheikh- ishme, 2018, pp. 59-62.

⁵see: al-Sheikh- ishme, 2016, pp. 364-416; al-Sheikh- ishme, 2018, pp. 59-81.

*Sharnaqa*⁶/ *The Cocoon* by the Syrian woman writer, Hasiba Abd al-Rahman, the writer herself was the prisoner who was arrested for political reasons and was tortured behind the prison bars⁷. The writer here did not hesitate to reveal her experience in a literary text as a political prisoner. On the contrary, she added to her suffering in the prison her suffering as a persecuted and repressed woman outside it. In this literary genre, the writer is the prisoner who was imprisoned in the prison of her country for political, religious or social reasons. Thus, she reveals her own experience and not the experience of another woman, whom she heard about, even though she tried to camouflage it in its writing within the imaginative narrative art. Here, the experience of the "I", identifies with the 'prisoner', "the writer in Prison Literature", with the experience of the "I", "the writer in the Feminist Literature", as if we are in front of two characters in one character, where the "prisoner", in her narration of her suffering behind the bars, identifies with her suffering as a "woman" in a patriarchal society that had imprisoned her before in a metaphorical prison, which is no less severe, as it robbed her of her freedom and chained her by its legacy.

Identification between the "I" that had been imprisoned and is retrieving the prison experience in her aching memory with the "I" that is writing and retrieving those memories, to relive them at the moment of writing. The two experiences mix and integrate in their suffering and the impact of repression, in her quest to emancipate herself from this injustice, and in the interconnectivity of the creative experience when the time to reveal it comes during the process of literary writing. Her desire to reveal the pain that takes place in the soul turns into a semi-explosion that cries in the face of the world. Pain and the feeling of loss unite and the voice of revelation becomes one voice that is compatible and identical in all its feelings and emotions, and reaches the highest degrees of a genuine experience.

On the other hand, the Prison Literature reflects two images of the man, which are related to the reality of the prison: the jailor and the prisoner. The jailor represents the image of the traditional man: a symbol of the oppressive authority and its crackdown, and the unjust, authoritarian, violent and oppressive man. It is the negative image that the woman often tries to expose and exclude in her feminist literature. The imprisoned man, however, represents a different image – he is the oppressed man, who suffers like her from oppression and persecution, and thus he is in her position and faces a common enemy. In this sense, the man is reflected in the image of the intellectual educated open-minded humanitarian man, who reflects a completely opposite image to all that has been mentioned before. He respects the woman, appreciates her role in society, refuses her oppression, and calls for her freedom. He also appears in the image of the positive man, who opposes the policy of the political system and suppression of people's freedom. Besides, he is persecuted by the political, religious and social authorities; he is tortured behind the bars and is marginalized exactly like the woman. In this way, he meets with the oppressed woman; both are similar and both share injustice, marginalization, and exclusion.

Therefore, the woman believes that it is impossible to divide society or it is possible to liberate the woman separately from the man as it is impossible to divide between the two parts of society. Through confrontation of underdevelopment and backwardness, and by the resistance of oppression and pursuit of the man and the woman together, it becomes possible to liberate the woman by liberating society. Here, she realizes that she has to enter two wars: a war against tyranny of the political regime and its suppression, and a war against the factors of repression that society imposes

⁶Abd al-Rahman, Hasiba (1999). *al-Sharnaqa* (n.d.), (n.p.).

⁷For analysis of this novel, see: Sheikh-Hishmeh, 2018, pp. 59-81.

on her specifically through its religious and social authorities – the patriarchal society that is led by the repressing authoritarian man. Therefore, she tries in her writings to sympathize with the repressed man and expose the types of repression that he is exposed to, exactly as she tries to reveal what she is exposed to, which means that his issue will become her case, and vice versa.

In this way, yearning for freedom and liberation from the varied types of repression becomes a fundamental headline for the points of intersections between the Prison Literature and Feminist Literature. Here, and at this very point, the imprisoned writer, who expressed his experience in the Prison Literature meets the imprisoned woman writer, who also revealed her experience in her literary text. They meet in the same tunnel and the same suffering; the experience is similar, and they share it as they share creativity and the creative experience. They also share repression of a common enemy, and the authority of suppression in all its forms. Here, writing for them turns into a means of liberation from the burden of the experience. Their pursuit of freedom meet at the time of silence and taming, aware of the role of the pen as a weapon for their struggle.

In this way, his experience goes hand in hand with her experience of suffering, and the burden of suppression, first, and second, in their quest for liberation from this injustice, and third, in the correlation of the experience when the time of revelation in the creative process and literary writing arrives. Based on that, narration and writing in this regard turns into a means of remedial purification to empty the soul of its torture and aching memory. Consequently, writing in these two genres becomes a revenge act and a revolution of accountability and condemnation of the authorities, on the one hand, and an act of disclosure, exposure, emptying, purification and emancipation from shackles of captivity of the Self, on the other.

Therefore, they cannot be established or formulated except under the motif of "freedom". Since Feminist Literature is a penetrative revolutionary literature that seeks emancipation, freedom and breaking of traditional shackles on the levels of form and content, Prison Literature intersects with it at this point. Since the educated prisoner, who is a political opponent or dissident who struggles by the weapon of the word and exposes this repression by strengthening the cry of the Self in the face of injustice, the woman is like him in the Feminist Literature: she struggles against injustice, breaks through all taboos by writing and disclosure in order to strengthen her self-image and emphasize her rights, qualification, and existence, and she turns into a 'Scherezade' who breaks taboos and challenges restrictions and forbidden things despite her certain knowledge of the strict punishments that await her under an authoritarian society.

Just as Prison Literature constitutes a revolution against regimes of suppression and their prisons, Feminist Literature is also a rebellion and a revolution against the suppressive male patriarchal norms and a breaking of the political, social, religious and literary taboos. If the experience of the Prison Literature is a private experience, the Feminist Literature is also a private experience that the writer describes and discloses by words.

If the writer in Prison Literature often depends on his disclosure and revelation on the instruments of stream of consciousness and the first-person-singular narrator, the woman writer also depends on the same instruments in her feminist narration. While writing for the woman is a state of disclosure and purification accountability of the authoritarian repressive man, the Prison Literature is also a state of disclosure, purification, and accountability of the authority and its jailor. If the prison means imprisonment of someone at a certain place, and prevention of his movement, the feminist thought means movement and refusal of stability. If Prison Literature yearns for freedom and refuses imprisonment, they meet here through their refusal of shackles, and yearning for freedom. Since the woman writes in order to assert herself

within the male system that dominates society, the writer of Prison Literature writes in order to assert the prisoner's self and recover its right of existence after its exclusion and absence. Consequently, both are two literary genres that are formed through the duality of 'presence and absence', the presence of the prison and shackles in absence of freedom and absencing the self and identity.

The correlation between these two types/ genres also takes place on the level of form by relying on modernist and post-modernist formal and stylistic techniques by motivation of slipping from the traditional restrictions of writing and its norms. Modernity provided them with a significant positive response to freedom and refusal to the system of the traditional authoritarian literary tradition. The quest of the woman writer to detach herself from the classical forms towards a new artistic form stems from two justifications: the first is her quest for emancipation from the authority of the man, and her revolution against the contents and male norms that are considered purely male products. The second is her attempt to circumvent the repressive system and emancipation from the suppression of the forbidden trinity. In this way, the woman writer resembles the man writer in his search for emancipation from all these authorities.

Feminist Prison Literature confirms this correlation and intersection. It also proves that what the woman writes in Prison Literature does not differ in its thematic and technical manifestations from what the man writes. This is attributed, first, to the similarity between prisons and their reality, and second, to the particularity of the human experience, and third, to the emphasis on the ability of the woman writer to produce creative works. All this refutes the views that seek to devalue the woman's literature and to claim that she is incapable of facing the world and its issues.

This study reveals the woman's participation in Prison Literature and her contribution with the man writer to the clear condemnation of the repressive reality. Thus, her writings become a witness to the degree that the Arab repression has reached, and the suffering that the woman has undergone, like the man, due to her opposition to the forbidden trinity and its taboos.

The Novel *Nis al-Munkar/ Women of Evil* as a Sample

It was mentioned above that a certain text can be attributed to feminist prison literature if it enjoys certain specifications. The Saudi Arabian writer Samar al-Muqrin succeeded in combining in her novel *Nis al-Munkar*⁸ all the required conditions clearly. She combined the criteria of Prison Literature and the specifications of feminist literature and its issues. If the word in Feminist Prison Literature turns into a weapon that exposes the mechanisms of oppression, the function that al-Muqrin performs in this novel is a model for everything that was mentioned before. She writes her novel in order to expose the oppression that people keep silent about. This novel, which was exposed to the scissors of the religious and social censor in Saudi Arabia, as the writer herself pointed out in one of her interviews, was considered a daring novel that penetrated the taboos of sex, religion and politics in a conventional strict society, which fully refuses such audacity and illegitimate love-relationships. The Saudi society shows its strong resentment about this book and considers it a blasphemy and prohibited its publication in Saudi Arabia⁹.

⁸al-Muqrin, Samar (2008). *Nis al-Munkar*. Beirut: Dar al-Saqi.

⁹Samar al-Muqrin was asked about the body who prohibited publishing her novel in Saudi Arabia: "Was the prohibition basically the role of censorship institutions the role of other institutions that are more oppressive such as the strict political and religious authority?" She replied saying: "The political authority in Saudi Arabia is extremely open and does not interfere in

The Gulf writer, like the rest of Arab women writers, lives under the weight of obstacles that work on her marginalization. They narrow her creative freedom and do not accept her writings as they accept the man's writings, and consequently, the oppression of the patriarchal male society on her is doubled. Under this male patriarchal biased circumstances against the woman, writing for her becomes a conflict against the man's concepts and society's mentality and becomes an attempt to destroy these constants. Therefore, in the last decades, the woman started raising her voice and has become more daring in revealing society's oppression and its forms, and started resisting the man and his authority by writing, with which she started recovering her lost freedom and destroying society's outlook and the walls of the forbidden (haram), shame, and blasphemy.

Therefore, Fawziya Rachid says: "Writing, and more for the Gulf woman, is a real objective correlative for her self-assertion, which took place later than self-assertion of other women in other Arab areas. Writing offers the possibility of the alternative and compensation for the late self-assertion in societies in other Arab areas. Writing gives the possible alternative and compensation for the late feminist self-assertion in societies that suffer a lot from factors of underdevelopment and ignorance and different means of deterrence. In general, they are writings that, in the beginning, dealt with frustrations of self-alienation and graduated till broader openness started covering other wide horizons outside that curbed Self under the impact of psychological and social accumulation"¹⁰. There is no doubt that "feminist writing is considered one of the most important projects through which the woman seeks to assert her existence culturally and personally in society because writing represents for her "explosion of the suppressed and the hidden that have accumulated over time only to declare it in her debate with the man. The woman's concern is her social, political, and physical emancipation, and the man is certainly the head of the hindering powers that prevent her from being free"¹¹.

such matters and evidence to that is that the Servant of the Two Harams, King Abdullah bin Abd al-Aziz is the one who urges us to freedom of expression, and I think that the whole world noticed the openness that is taking place in Saudi Arabia after assuming office. Prohibition in my opinion was a personal reasoning of some officials in the Ministry of Culture and Media who appease the religious authority and are connected to them through common interests. It is impossible to divide the censorship and the religious and political motives for prohibition. Usually, the censorship moves through these motives, and consequently, it becomes clear that prohibition is motivated by thoughts of a trend called (religious), who do not accept the existence of thoughts that they are not satisfied with to be accessible to the Saudi reader". For more about this issue, see: La rash, Nawara (on:15/5/2009). "al-Katibawa al-Riwa iyya Samar al-Muqrin as a Host of al-Nur". Al-Nur Institution li al-Thaqafawa al-Ilam. On: <http://www.alnoor.se/article.asp?id=47662>. For more information about the reality of the Gulf woman writer and her literature, see: Saleh, Laila Mohammad (1983). *Adab al-Mar ah fi al-Jazeerawa al-Khalij al- Arabi: Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab of Emirates. Kuwait: ManshuratDhat al-Salasil, Part 1*; Rashid, Fawziyya. *al-Mar ah al-Mubdi ah fi al-Khalij*". *MajallatNizwa*. On: <http://www.nizwa.com>; and Ramsay, Gail (2002-2003). "Styles of Expression in Women's Literature in the Gulf". *OrientaliaSuecana*. Sweden: Uppsala, Vol. LI-LII, pp. 371-390.

¹⁰Rachid, "al-Mar ah al-Mub iah fi al-Khalij" in *MajallatNizwa*. On <http://www.nizwa.com>

¹¹Jaridi, Sami (2008). *al-Riwaya al-Nisa iyya al-Sudiyya: Lhitab al-Mar ahwaTashk l al-Sard*. Beirut: Mu asasat al-Intishar al-Arabiyy, pp. 78-80.

The novel *Nis al-Munkaris* attributed to the Feminist Prison Literature, where the Prison, as an actual and metaphorical place, plays a prominent role in the novel. The novel reveals the violence against the prisoner Sara and other Saudi women prisoners, who were imprisoned for their passionate love, and conveys the suffering of the Saudi woman if she tries to live her life in love. If she falls in love, her love will soon turn into an evil that is besieged by the religious and social censorship and its police: "the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice".

What characterizes this novel is that it highlights a woman prisoner, a woman who is imprisoned behind the prison iron bars, a woman who had been suffering from metaphorical bars with which her society besieged her. Therefore, her oppression is doubled after imprisonment. Ironically, the prison is not more merciful to the woman than the man; it is more severe because it identifies with its curse with the taboos of the conventional society and its social and religious authorities, which bear down on her and consequently, the weight of the walls and their horror are doubled on her.

After reading the novel, it becomes clear to the reader that the writer refers by the word "al-Munkar" the man-woman "love and passion". As "love" is considered an "evil", a "taboo", and a "shame" or disgrace" that is prohibited for every Saudi woman, "the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice" have to persecute every woman who falls in love and meet her lover and expresses her love to him. The result is that she is imprisoned as if she committed the most horrible crimes. This is confirmed by what is written on the back cover of the book. "Samar al-Muqrin made an effort to acquaint the people, all people, with the brutal ways that are employed by those who murder the dignity of man, his freedom and rights in the name of religious teachings... She conveyed from the prisons and jails stories of torture and aspersions that cause social catastrophes that destroyed family relationships and ruined homes that were safe and secure"¹²

Probably, the information that appears on the back cover of the novel and introduces the writer as a journalist explains her exposure to stories of Saudi women prisoners who were imprisoned by the police of the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. At the bottom of the cover page, we read: "Samar al-Muqrin is a Saudi journalist and writer. She works at the newspaper of *Awan al-Kuwaitiya*, and she has a column called "Dou'/ Light" in *Bint al-Khalij* the Emirati magazine. She dealt with the issues of the Saudi women prisoners and published tens of investigations and reports on them. She also adopted lots of issues of violence and discrimination against the woman in the Saudi society". In addition to what has been said, the writer says in another threshold: "I visited the women's prison, and the stories I heard there killed me; I knew afterwards that whatever I try, I will not return to what I was before I heard these stories"¹³.

Thus, the source of these stories becomes clear, which might confirm that they are personal experiences of Saudi women, who lived this suffering and the writer decided to expose them in a creative text. In this regard, I believe that the writer may have only changed the names of the women prisoners in order to camouflage and prevaricate in her words but still keep the content of the real stories. What is mentioned in these thresholds confirms that Prison Literature is evidence and a product of a living experience.

On the other hand, these thresholds uncover a clear meta-text in which the writer reveals the extent of the impact

¹²al-Muqrin, 2008, back cover of the novel.

¹³Ibid., p. 5.

that she psychologically had when she heard these stories and the impact of their cruelty on her, as they were a troubling incentive that made her scream her own scream in the novel. This means that she depended on the art of fiction that has an imaginative dimension that is derived from real experiences.

Dependence on the imaginative dimension granted her freedom in flipping these self-experiences without fear, and assisting horizons to hide and vanish when telling the truth and revelation of the prohibited that people keep silent about a danger and a taboo. If not so, why was the writer not satisfied with uncovering these experiences in a press report as she is a journalist? Why did she chose the fictional art? Thus, the writer exposes the torment and oppression that these women experienced. Their only guilt is that they fell in love, and this is the source of her interest in these women prisoners, who were chased by the police of the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice for their "crime of love" and their desire to look for it freely. There is no doubt that her novel is a protest outcry against all the for granted postulates that rob the woman of her rights, against the authorities of oppression and their accountability, and against the man's guardianship on the feelings of the women and their rights.

The Woman as a Prisoner between the Metaphorical and Real Prison

Sara, the main character in the novel, suffered before her experience in the actual prison, from another prison: "Eight years she held the nickname "married" on the papers, but in reality, she was nothing but "suspended" and the traditional conscience does not hesitate to describe her in front of herself as the 'sin carrier'¹⁴. In the last two years of this period, Ra f enters her life and she loves him. His relationship with Sara starts "through the telephone wires and behind the computer screens"¹⁵. She holds on to him and feels that he "returns her to the life that she had hated and worked hard in it for six years"¹⁶.

Their yearning to the first meeting leads them to London for ten days. There, they enjoy the freedom of meeting and practicing love far from the eyes of the "peeping Saudis". After their return to Riyadh, and due to her strong yearning to meet him, she asks to meet him at a family-restaurant so that they will not raise doubt. In the beginning, Ra f refuses because he realized that this was a serious risk: "Be patient my sweetheart; the situation is very serious; al-Riyadh is not like any other city. Here, the man of the Commanding Committee can arrest you while you are eating"¹⁷.

However, she succeeds in persuading him. When they meet at the entrance of the restaurant, Sara says: "I was not able to kiss him or hug him or even shake hands with him. As I came closer to him, he walked in front of me like any Saudi person who walks ahead of his wife, and she walks behind him". Inside the restaurant, the worker suspects that they are not a married couple and tells the Prohibition Police, who arrest them brutally.

Sara is punished a double punishment of that of Ra f though they are two sides in the love-relationship and the same "crime" or "munkar/ evil". Ra f was not jailed except for three months and had fifty lashes. However, Sara was imprisoned for three years. Therefore, she expresses that with a feeling of suppression: "Even the Holy Koran, whose rules the judge claims he is applying, did not distinguish between the punishment of the man and the woman for a crime like the

¹⁴Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 36.

one we were accused of"¹⁸. First, she is tortured and beaten severely, and then, she is forced to sign confessions that she did not do so that she can be released.

She refuses to sign, and is beaten sharply on her head till she loses her consciousness. "After three years in prison and absence and death," she returns carrying with her a file of preceding crimes like any other criminal". This file deprives her of her work, life and gains; "It deprives me to be who I am"¹⁹. After serving the sentence, she is fired from her workplace, and she is compelled to work as a 'Sabbaba' / Coffee-Barista, at one of the wedding palaces. Sara was not only deprived of her job and earning but was robbed of her "I/entity" and her Self was violated. Besides, the prison added to her a stigma of disgrace that defames her all her life. This treatment indicates that the injustice with which the authorities treat the woman is more than the injustice with which they treat the man. Thus, Sara's loss is double and the irony is that the first night she works as a 'Sabbaba' was the night of Ra f's wedding to another woman at the same place.

At the moment Sara enters the prison, this place succeeds in distracting her and robbing her of her mind. It also leads her to have doubts about everything. "Everything is contradictory and incomprehensible"²⁰. New unfamiliar live in the darkness of this prison: "life and death"²¹. It is the dialectic of freedom and prison and their contradiction: freedom and chains, openness and closure, life and death.

At that moment, she looks for her Self, Sara's self, for every means that protects her from madness and loss of consciousness and keeps her internal freedom for her. In the alienation of the prison, this grave-place, there is an incomparable alienation: "In the prison, there is a real alienation that no one has ever tried, neither anyone who deserted his homeland, nor anyone who was burnt with the fire of refuge to the camps"²². It is "the most bitter place in this world"²³.

What escalated Sara's suffering is her feeling of oppression because she was imprisoned for the love that she looked for and saw as one of her rights. Then, her sufferings increase more when she is imprisoned in the Solitary Cell: "I, who got used to silk furniture, I sleep now on a mattress, most of which has been eaten by rats, and I was not able to stretch my small feet on it. As soon as I straighten my body, my feet fall into the opening of the ground toilet"²⁴. "Place in its closed compartments includes intensive Time"²⁵. Since the first moments of arrest, the color of Time and its taste change and its realization becomes difficult: "I do not remember how much time has passed since I became alone in this room. Time is one of the most difficult criteria that I can realize in the prison, where Time moves very slowly and the person feels that life has stopped, and the Earth has stopped revolving. Everything changes. I even stopped remembering anything from my features because there is no mirror through which I can recover the features of my face, which I felt they changed. I have

¹⁸Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 74.

²⁰Ibid., p. 53.

²¹Ibid., p. 53.

²²Ibid., p. 56.

²³Ibid., p. 56.

²⁴Ibid., p. 57.

²⁵Bachelard, Gaston (1984). *Aesthetics of Place*. Tr. by GhalebHalsa. Beirut: al-Mu'asasa al-Jami'iyya li al-Dirasatwa al-Nashr, p. 39.

often touched my face with my hands in order to be sure about that²⁶. In this way, the Prison becomes a place that violates the human being and makes him lose his mind. It also robs him of his sense of existence, and thus, he loses his features and is smashed down. It is an act of absence and absencing. In this prison, you will live the meaning of "prison, absence and death"²⁷.

As the days go by without knowing the crime that she committed or the punishment that she will get, her psychological conditions get worse and worse. She cannot stand having food anymore or anything that strengthens her body. Due to her poor conditions and out of a refusal to what was happening to her, she decides to go on a hunger strike. The officer punishes her and puts her in an Isolation Cell. Thanks to the diligence of the Prison Female Staff, the officer was persuaded to return her to the Prison ward. After all her convictions of the possibility of recognition that she was not a criminal evaporated, she started waiting for the time in which she appears in the court to accept any judgement²⁸.

Probably, what the writer of this novel is doing is her observation of Saudi women prisoners, who entered the prison because of their love and the opportunism of the man as we see in the experiences of Samira, Nora, and Khawla, where the writer points out most of the taboos that suppress the Gulf woman in general and the Saudi woman in particular, and deprive her of a lot of her rights and liberties. These social taboos and norms include the censorship of the religious authority that identifies with the social authority and the political authority that keep silent about their actions. There is no doubt that the writer depended in that on what she heard from the women prisoners and adopted their issues and employed their stories that "killed" her through the characters of the novel.

The story of the prisoner Nora focuses on her commitment to Yasser against her parents' will, but she did not taste happiness with him. After a short period of their marriage, she realizes that he is an unsuitable man for her and tells him about her desire to separate from him, but "his pride made him refuse to believe that he is not a suitable man"²⁹. Yasser started innovating all kinds of means of torture against her. Therefore, she decided to betray him: "Yes, I was betraying him, and I will betray him consciously with all my mental powers because simply he is a man who deserves nothing except betrayal"³⁰. When she heard while she was in prison that he divorced her, she screamed: "Go away forever"³¹. He divorced her "after he took over all her property"³².

However, Sara found prisoner Samira dwelling in the cell for more than "six years because of a murder that she committed against a man who skinned her humanity from her. She did not think that time of anything except how to get rid of him after he troubled her life. Her tragedy was that she refused to marry a man who was stalking her and she got rid of him by shooting him after he tore her heart and assassinated her soul: "Males refuse but call her "a murderer", but what

²⁶al-Muqrin, 2008, p. 58.

²⁷Ibid., p. 76.

²⁸Ibid., p.57-58.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 49-50.

³⁰Ibid., p. 50.

³¹Ibid., p. 49.

³²Ibid., p. 49.

crime did she commit compared to the crimes of a man who assassinated the soul of the female in her?"³³

It appears that the influence of these stories that she heard and expressed in the word "killed me" is reflected most on Sara's tongue with regard to the imprisonment of Khawla, the prisoner, who was punished "four years and seven hundred lashes" for her passionate love. Sara says about that: "Even in the Koranic Sura, *the Light*, God ordered that a male and female fornicators should be whipped one hundred lashes, and I do not know how that number doubled and from which Sharia it came"³⁴. Khawla's crime is that she is a widower and fell in love with a man "love from which the men of the Police Staff deprived me". She did not commit any moral crime nor did she sleep with men. She confirms that she loved mer, and they promised to marry each other, emphasizing that "her body was never touched by anyone except her divorcee and lover, and if she gave it to her lover, she did that because it is her right and his right. They decided to get married but her divorcee delayed her marriage because he kidnapped her children from her and did not leave to her anyone except the youngest one; she was afraid to get married, and thus, he would deprive her of them all her life, and therefore, she put off her marriage till her brother ends this problem and returns her children to her. However, on a certain night, and after mer goes out from her house, the Police of the Commanding Committee arrest her. And here, she is residing in the prison, and meeting her little daughter a few limited times a month. She says: "I wrote to them what they wanted; I wrote the story of my love that was far from the perception of such men, who understand nothing of what love is, and will never understand"³⁵

Ghada, Sara's friend, was not imprisoned but she was besieged outside the prison by metaphorical bars that suffocated her and robbed her of her life. Ghada got married when she was in her first academic year and fell in the grip of her violent husband "Yusuf", who proposed to her but she did not see him again till their wedding day. Her ignorance and commitment to the social traditions and shackles dropped her into a marriage to a man whom she did not know. The thing that points out Ghada's ignorance is that she thought that her joy in the wedding costume will crown her life with happiness but actually, she felt vanquished and disappointed from the first night- the night in which Yusuf invaded her virginity in a rough way. He treated her cruelly and beat her brutally. Her mother refused to get her divorced from him. "We don't have divorced daughters"³⁶, though she came back to her one day with a swelling eye, and nothing appeared out of the blueness that surrounded her eye except a small red spot, and the other blindfolded eye³⁷.

Ghada took it upon herself to "live" and accept humiliation for fear that there will be 'divorced daughters' in her family, but after her mother's death, she deserted Yusuf and divorced him. Since the days of conveying condolences, she refused to come back to the matrimonial home, believing that she is the weaker link, as he "walks and decides and performs according to male laws and male courts and a male patriarchal society, and she has to organize the progression of her life, or at least to stand up in the face of all that tyranny, with which the woman is treated in this country and according to feminine regulations and masculine application"³⁸.

³³Ibid., p. 51.

³⁴Ibid., p. 59.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 60-64.

³⁶Ibid., p.71-73.

³⁷Ibid., pp. 65-66.

³⁸Ibid., p. 73.

Sara, however, was not in a better condition regarding "Man's loyalty" and his opportunism. After Ra'is is released from the Prison before her, he does not try to ask about her conditions. After she is released from the prison, she finds that he abandoned her and did not bear responsibility for the sin with her, at least in front of her mother or relatives and neighbors. She realizes that her relationship with him was nothing more than a whim of a man on whose bed tens of women have passed and more tens will pass after her³⁹

Thus, the novel *Nis al-Munkar* was not far from the revelation of the woman's frustration psychologically and physically in a male patriarchal virile unjust society that sees the woman just as an attractive seductive body that causes the man's sin. She finds herself in her society a suppressed and accused female, and her society is handcuffed by shackles of discrimination against her, where the Police of Prohibition persecute her, suppress her with traditions and norms, conceal her from appearance, and tie her by the veil (niqab).

The writer also points out the social attitude and corruption towards the woman, who is suppressed by all sides whether they are liberals or Islamists, hinting by that to the most cruel types of suppression. The parents abandon their daughters. The woman's entrance to the prison for a moral accusation means that she has become an outcast all her life, which is very likely to push her to prostitution as there is no other choice for a stigmatized woman. If she is an officer, she loses her job, and if she is a mother, she loses her motherhood and parents⁴⁰. The writer adds through Sara's words: "The Saudi woman will inevitably suffer from inferiority because she has not got anything of her rights"⁴¹.

In this society, the woman is prohibited from intermingling with men, and she is repressed by being forced to wear a veil (niqab) and is being restricted by it, and she is not allowed to uncover her face or express her emotion freely. Besides, she is not allowed to drive a car⁴². "We, the Saudi women are still calling shyly, and sometimes in fear, for the right to drive a car, while the call of our Kuwaiti neighbor has reached her political rights"⁴³.

The woman's intermingling with men is prohibited, and the policeman shouts at her: "Cover your face, you woman!"⁴⁴ Sara describes what happens to the woman at the markets, where she hears "the screams of men of the Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice on women", which are followed by acceleration of their steps, and confusion and fear and disappearance behind a column or a wall inside one of the shops in order to get rid of her weakness and fear of the power of the religious policeman, who can do whatever he likes to her. This is only because he does not like the way she wears her cloak. From his point of view, she might be wearing makeup, which makes her a center around which the men's lust is focused, and thus, she seduces them and conceals their eyes from paradise. Women in their definition are sexual seducers, and they are the managers of men's sins...Inside this veil (niqab), the Saudi women live all types of contradictions. If they want to be engaged in prostitution, they can do it because they are concealed from others. A

³⁹Ibid., p. 37.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 58.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 29.

⁴²Though Saudi Arabia granted women the right of driving cars in 2019, when this law was passed in 2019, when this law was passed by the initiative of Prince Crown, Mohammed bin Salman.

⁴³al-Muqrin, 2008, pp. 22-23.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 12.

lot of them believe that the Saudi man is the only male among the men of the world from whom she has to veil herself".⁴⁵ Then she says: "I do not forget a scene of a woman who was standing in front of a driver without any veil, and when her brother-in-law passed, she raised a piece of paper she was holding in order to conceal her face from him".⁴⁶

Therefore, the writer criticizes the veil/ niqab, which the woman is forced to wear, and considers it a repressive means through which the strict society aims to vanquish the woman and repress her and force her to hide herself, as if she were a 'defect' (awrah) and a stimulus of lust and a cause of sin, and ultimately, it pushes her to a life of hypocrisy and double standards. She also criticizes the behavior of the Police of Prevention of Vice, the religious authority that besieges the woman and imprisons her between the walls of taboos and moral constants that cannot be touched by anyone.

The Image of the Man as a Jailor

Under these circumstances of suppression, the jailor's identity is no more important for the woman. It makes no difference if the jailor wears a policeman's uniform in the prison or if he is the suppressive man/jailor in her male patriarchal authoritarian society as her life has become like a large prison that robs her liberties and rights. Since the novel *Nis al-Munkar* belongs to the Feminist Prison Literature, it means that we are talking here about two images of men jailors: the image of the jailor at the actual prison; and the image of the fictional jailor, who is represented in the character of the authoritarian traditional man at the metaphorical level, who represents his authoritarian male patriarchal society.

The writer describes the cruelty of "The Staff Police" that arrest Sara with Ra f. After a few moments of Sara's meeting with him at the restaurant, she hears voices and screams that rise high "the Staff"! After that, the serial of arrest and humiliation and beating starts. "Four bearded-men" pounce at Ra f and the fifth one was a soldier with a military uniform. They frogged him and dragged him. The sixths dragged Sara saying: "Ahead of me, you libertine one!" Sara says: "I saw them throw Ra f at the back of their salon car; they loaded him and threw him in front of me as if he were a sheep. I cried so that some people would hear and come and help us; he slapped me so strongly on my face that I felt and lost my sight. They dragged me to the car... I sat on the ground resisting their power; the man started dragging me on the asphalt road till that I felt my blood flow on him." They threw her in the car and the man started beating her all the way long everywhere on her body in every direction; her head got the biggest share of beating till she fainted.

As soon as they arrived at "The Staff Station", one of them wrapped her with her cloak so strongly that he squeezed her and dragged her: "Go ahead of me, you, loose woman!". Then "the Staff Men deprived her of her bag, her mobile, and her watch, and even her shoes so that her dignity will be tightly flouted," as if she committed an unforgivable crime. "Cover yourself!, God curse you and curse evil women like you!" When she tries to reply, his thick foot hits her belly." He started beating her severely and repeatedly on the same place till his beatings knocked her down on the "land of the flouted dignity"; her body absorbed them all".⁴⁷ However, her major suffering was not limited to beating but also to his request that she sign a sheet that she admits crimes that she did not commit as a condition to her release. She refuses absolutely but her refusal was not well-received by Sheikh Obeid, who was holding the equipment in his hand: "a broad-headed wooden stick, with a thin stalk, wrapped in a black sticker", with which he beat her so sharply on her head till blood flew from it and she fainted: "It greeted me in the best possible way, the head against the head; it dropped blows, one

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 14-15.

⁴⁶Ibid., p.14-15.

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 43-45.

after the other, with its head on my head; he wanted to enjoy it; so he once hit with the rod, and once with his hand till blood covered my face, and I was no more aware of what was happening".⁴⁸

When she meets the investigator, she realizes that she is not having an investigation but a full condemnation, which she could not defend herself against. "Dating and love" are a crime that she has to admit. She points out the cruelty of investigation and the obscene words that the investigator said:

"I have never heard in my life obscene words such as those that I hear from that investigator, on whose side there was a sheikh who is considered according to the law of my country an alternative to the "mahram" (who is a member of one's family with whom marriage would be considered haram / illegal). Phrases that are tougher than bitter life itself. He was describing to me the sexual intercourse by obscene words and talking directly to my sexual organ, and then he would ask me questions that I hate to remember".⁴⁹

Sara was also prevented from visiting her mother, and she met her twice only. She was not able to lay her soul in her lap. She was talking to her and a long window that separated between them and the voices of the visitors that were intertwined with the voices of the women prisoners⁵⁰. Behind the bars of the prison, Sara realized the extent of the man's hypocrisy and her society and their dual standards; the "real faces of the world" started to be clearer.

The dialectic of the woman's conflict with her jailor is represented in her challenge not only to her actual jailor but to her metaphorical jailor as well. That jailor is her authoritarian, male patriarchal society and all its taboos. Her jailor can be a real man and can be a whole society in its traditions and customs. The image of the man-jailor is represented in feminist literature in the traditional image of the man: the oppressive, the violent, the tyrannical, the opportunist, and the selfish man, who is a symbol of the repressive authority and the source of devastation. This role can be played by a father, a brother, a husband, or any man in her society, who appoints himself in charge of her and robs her of her freedom. It is that negative image which the woman always tries expose and destroy in her feminist literature. The writer of the novel exposes the man and criticizes him daringly. She also exposes the methods of the Staff Police and break the religious and social taboo and expose those who rob the woman of her dignity and her rights, and suppress her in the name of religion and its sanctities and the name of society and its norms and standards. Through Sara, she compares between the Islamists who constitute the so-called Staff-Men / Commanding Men who imprisoned Sara and the liberals:

"Many ugly faces, no matter whether they are bearded or shaved, or Islamists or liberals, crowd in front of me. Probably the only difference between them, which made the liberals of a better image in our eyes, is that they possess authority in the country, which makes them oppress the woman, as the Islamists do. There are lots of descriptions that combine between the two types that are concerned with the woman specifically. Both of them see the woman as a pot for pleasure. The first type covers her with any dress so that this pot will not ignite the men's instincts. The second type wants to uncover her in front of everyone so that to show others his degree of virility and the pot of his lust. The first type sees that she is his own property and he has the right to blackmail her, to suppress her, and to exclude her so that evil will not

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 47.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 54.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 53.

fly. The second type also sees that she is his own property and he has the right to oppress her and exclude her, but they differ in application and each type applies his points of view from his angle".⁵¹

The writer reveals the negative features of the image of the man whatever his tendencies are. Men are "giants who cannot be humble and whose heads do not bow".⁵² The man is "full of duality; he gives her everything if he is in love with her, but if he is angry with her, he shows her his hatred, rejection, and humiliation... he is not ready to cure her wounds... he enjoys the sadism with which he tortures himself and her". If he apologizes, "he does not apologize through the lover's submission, and does not realize that the lovers go beyond the issue of dignity and respect".⁵³ The man often seeks to appear liberal and open, but he hides the character of the traditional man, who is still wearing the dresses of social sediments and constants. He does not forgive the woman's relationships or her past as he forgives himself and justifies his relationships, too.

As for Ra f's character, it is true that he is a victim of religious authority like Sara, but the writer does not show him in a sympathetic and forgiving way. It is true that he was imprisoned and tortured but his suffering was less, and the period he was sentenced to was shorter too, which strengthens the image of the man in a male patriarchal authoritarian society that looks at him and his "honor" with tolerance and condoning, while the woman is the source of sin, obscenity and shame, and her condemnation should be greater because her crime is greater. Ra f was describing himself in front of Sara as a 'modernist', which means that he was a man outside the frame of intellectual traditionalism that accompanies the oriental man in general. However, in the end, he returns to his 'origin' and considers the woman's entrance of a semi-married woman into a relationship with the other a treason. Sara confirms that though he was a partner in this relationship, he suggests in his behavior that he did not accept what she does, considering her like his society: "a traitor and a sin committer". Ra f was an opportunist and a model of the fake man who holds a double-standard outlook towards the woman. The woman for him is merely a commodity and an object for pleasure. Therefore, he easily denies his loyalty and belonging. In my view, and though he was actually a prisoner behind the bars of the actual prison, he was a prisoner on the symbolic indicative level to his traditional mentality and he was not less oppressive and less unjust in his treatment of Sara. Actually, he does not differ from his jailor inside the prison, except a little bit.

In the writer's opinion, the Saudi Arabian man in particular and the oriental man in general deals with the woman with superiority, opportunism and meanness. Therefore, she attacks him through Sara saying:

"The creature who is described as "a man" does not possess the power for which people glorified him, and for which the raised him above the woman. All his superiority to the woman lies in his ability to hold a few kilograms more than her. However, with regard to his external appearance, he is not taller, nor broader in his shoulders. You, who describe her as 'weak' are cowards, and none is weak except you. You fear the woman, you are scared of meeting her and fail to curb your instincts towards her. In her presence, the power of your muscles evaporates and the prestige of your beards and moustaches vanishes. Just one gesture from her moves you in every direction".⁵⁴

⁵¹Ibid., p. 56.

⁵²Ibid., p. 7.

⁵³Ibid., p. 33.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 101-11.

Yasser, the husband of prisoner Nora, is another image of the 'jailor': "He divorced her after he took over all her property including her house, her furniture, and her money, which she collected after a long journey in the service of the Ministry of Education and Culture"⁵⁵. He was a symbol of the selfish man-jailor, who has no values or morals". Nora can either be the smashed tool of his lusts, or he will turn into ashes. "The giant here is the one who pledges himself to the suffering of the other"⁵⁶. However, if the woman refuses a man like prisoner Nora, woe upon her. The authoritarian bossy male does not accept the word "No!" that a woman says to him in the face. These men "believe that refusal invites defense on one's masculinity... they are lustful, and despite their exaggerated desire in possessing the others, they do not possess anything in her presence, and therefore, they tread over all values and principles, and so the female despises them and her contempt to them increases"⁵⁷. Samira is not deterred from confronting her jailor; she challenges and rebelled against him in search of her freedom. Her rebellion reached such a degree that she carries a rifle and emptied it in his bell. Her imprisonment was the price that she paid all her life. Thus, the woman here turns from being a victim into a criminal under the rules of this society and its jailors.

In this way, al-Muqrin combines the Feminist Literature and Prison Literature, proving the affinity of her novel to the Feminist Prison Literature genre, confirming that the jailor in Feminist Prison Literature does not differ from the man "jailor", whether inside or outside the prison. She also emphasizes the manifestations of oppression behind the bars of the prison and oppression outside it in the "large prison". There is no difference in such a society between a jailor who wears his official uniform and a jailor who is, in reality, an opportunist man who claims to be what he is not. They are two faces of the same coin: the face of the oppressive jailor and the face of injustice, opportunism, and duality in a "prison without bars". Hence, suppression is the same, no matter how much its hats and faces differ.

The Dominance of Female Personality - Yearning to Break the Trinity

Among the most prominent features of the feminist narrative is the dominance of the female character in the text. The repressive practices that the man has exerted pushed the feminist narrative to adopt the idea of excluding the man and isolating him from the centrality of the text as an attempt to take revenge on him and marginalizing him in reality. Therefore, the modern Arabic feminist narrative seeks to intensify the production of female characters and positioning them in the center of the literary text and depriving the man of the starring roles that were exclusive to him in the traditional narrative instead of assigning the starring roles to her, and transforming her into a dominant character that controls the narrative process and moving its events. Taking the starring roles from the man and assigning them to the woman is intended to strengthen the status of the woman, first, in the literary text, and second, aspires to achieve this status in her real daily life"⁵⁸. It seems that she likes to dominate her reality as she dominates the literary discourse.

Thus, she restores the literary status that was stolen from her, and emphasizes her marginalization of the man as revenge on him, her refusal to her subordination and dependence on him, and her pursuit to emancipate herself from his authority on her and her life. Therefore, the novel *Nis al-Munkar* was written by a woman, and its events are concerned

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 52.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 52.

⁵⁸ affouri, 2011, pp. 333-334.

with her experiences, and the narration is performed by a woman, which makes the woman novel both the narrator of the novel and its subject matter simultaneously. Thus, Sara dominates the authority of the narrative and the world of the text and its events.

As this novel is basically established on the description of the prison experience as a personal emotional experience that requires disclosure and diving into the Self, it becomes necessary to employ techniques that employ self-reflection, and a memory recall. Since this narrative tends to be writing from the Self, which is closer to soliloquy, it offers a larger opportunity to reveal the woman's self-perception about her existential position and her special vision about herself and the world. Therefore, al-Muqrin raises her voice strongly through Sara and says what she wants to say through the first-person singular pronoun. Through her heroine, the writer reveals her thoughts and private conceptions daringly and unequivocally, even if that undermines her society's taboos and prohibitions, and even if this daring might lead to her prevention from writing.

Therefore, there is no doubt that the narrator's choice of the first person singular strengthens the woman's status in the text, as the employment of the first-person pronoun is the best tool that grants priority to the female Self in literature, because it is more able to create conformity between life and literature⁵⁹. The first-person pronoun supports the feminist thought that positions the woman's character in the center of the text in order to bring up the woman's crucial issues, which turns her into a voice that represents all women.⁶⁰ The employment of the first-person pronoun is to serve the style of disclosure, recall and associations, where the writer is given the opportunity to speak for herself. Through that pronoun, she sails into the space of the soul, imagination and freedom, and freedom is the right that the woman needs in order to reveal her thoughts and feelings without fear of any censor. The first-person pronoun allows her to express herself in a way that is closer to confessions in such a way that makes the reader feel that he is reading real events due to the connection of the first-person pronoun to truth and honesty⁶¹. Besides, the employment of the first-person pronoun is considered an indicator of dealing with the introduced issues in a daring and serious way, and conclusive evidence to the narration of forbidden contents daringly.⁶² It emphasizes the writer's offensive tendency toward the traditional literary norms and her attempt to undermine them. This identifies with her offensive tendency against social norms, and religious, political and social taboos, which she deals with in this novel.

Talking through the employment of the first-person pronoun is intended to raise the woman's voice after it had been considered a defect (*awra*), and strengthens its presence after it had been tied by the culture of silence. Thus, her disclosure is brave and without stuttering, which supports the woman in her struggle to achieve her control of the text and superiority to the man. Besides, it indicates the woman writer's care about herself and her quest to assert her female identity in the world of the text.⁶³

Accordingly, concentration on the woman's search for her Self and her yearning to gain her freedom and to

⁵⁹ aha, Ibrahim (2007). "Swimming against the Current: Towards an Arabic Feminist Poetic Strategy". *Orientalia Suecana*. LVI, pp. 201-203.

⁶⁰ Saffouri, M., 2011, pp. 361-362.

⁶¹ aha, 2007, p. 204.

⁶² affouri, 2011, pp. 359-361.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 363.

achieve her desires and independence in life is among the most prominent features of the feminist literature in this context, where she emphasizes the model of the woman who refuses to be the victim. In order to achieve her dreams, she has to challenge and resist, and arm herself with a strong and daring character. In return, the man represents the oppressive authority and the real obstacle that stands in the woman's way. In order that the woman to set off in full freedom, she has to go beyond the obstacle of the man and his authority. al-Muqrin removed the man from his authoritarian position and handed the leadership over to the woman, not to 'any' woman, but to an educated female brave one who is aware of her rights.

Though the novel ends with Ra f's departure from her life forever, she does not show any signs of defeat or weakness. When Sara gets out of prison because of her "crime of love", carrying with her a record that prohibits her from work, life and earning, she insists on continuing her life and should not give up: "I have to get up and work and live".⁶⁴ She is obliged to work as aSabbaba/ Coffee Barista at one of the wedding palaces. "What forbids me to tread on the B.A. certificate and tear with it ten years of experience and work as a Coffee barista?"⁶⁵ Ironically, the first night of her work, when the novel ends with the screams of the lady in charge: "Cover yourself, harim (females); the groom has arrived", Ra f, the bridegroom enters. Sara says: "The bridegroom enters and my soul gets out with his steps. Ra f approached to depart forever"⁶⁶ Thus, Sara decides strongly and with determination to forget him and exclude him from her life forever; she decides not to give in to the love of a selfish man who gave her up.

As we see, the female character is the dominant one in the text – an active and a non-submissive female. Strict motives that move within her push her to work on asserting herself and regaining her freedom and rights, no matter how much she will pay in prison through suffering and breaking the trilogy of politics, religion, and sex.

Revolution against the Forbidden Trilogy and its Undermining

The writer revolts against the taboos of the forbidden trilogy: politics, religion, and sex. She breaks the political taboo by criticizing the Saudi political reality, in comparison with the political reality in Britain. Ra f tells Sara about the Speak Corner in Hyde Park and how each one can express his opinion freely without any censor: "Speak Corner is the place from which the Saudi opposition started such as Sa'd al-Faqih and Mohammad al-Misari". Sara replies: Oh! And the Saudi Government did not pay attention to them at that time to mask them before their paws get longer?" He replies to her: "This is Great Britain, the Castle of Democracy"⁶⁷

The writer points out the influence of political censorship at schools and universities such as the non-existence of universities in the Eastern region of Saudi Arabia for political reasons, where the Shiites live⁶⁸. Then she points out the extent of the effect of class disparities and the power of money and influence on the formation of this disparity and the existence of private schools for the rich people versus public schools, where the Ministry of Education and Culture forbids teaching sport or music, which affects the teaching curricula and the quality of teaching versus private schools, where these

⁶⁴ al-Muqrin, 2008, p. 76.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 76

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 70

subjects are taught".⁶⁹

The writer also criticizes the religious authority and the police of Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue due to what they do at restaurants, where tables are surrounded" by wooden barriers from every direction and prevent families from seeing one another. This is the system that prevails in restaurants in Riyadh in order to satisfy the religious authority, who tried for years to prevent restaurants from opening family salons, which was exclusive to the hotel restaurants under strict observation. When the religious authority wanted to allow families to enter restaurants, they were able to direct them as they liked"⁷⁰. Traditionally, a number of workers at the restaurants and hotels and furnished apartments were recruited to inform about any suspected case according to their criteria"⁷¹. The writer criticizes the recruitment of these workers and their exploitation of the poor ones and threatening them by firing, imprisoning, and disciplining them. If any worker suspects that there are two unmarried couples, they will immediately inform about them. The more the worker informs regularly, the more he keeps his workplace and lives comfortably".⁷²

The writer penetrates the social taboos by penetrating the taboo of sex, which is the most distinctive taboo in the woman's world. She shows her daring challenge against the customs and traditions of Saudi society. She employs the sexual language that the hero Sara celebrates, revealing a sexual experience with her lover Ra f in London where she travelled to meet him. She has an extra-marital relationship with him, a passionate love relationship, without feeling that it is a shame or forbidden according to the concepts of her society, who has no mercy on such relationships, where its performer is exposed to imprisonment, flogging, and torture, but she shows bravery in her challenge to these concepts when she travels to live ten days with Ra f in London. She appeared to be braver than him when she invites him to meet her at a restaurant after she returns to her homeland while Ra f shows his fear of the police of prevention.

In this relationship, Sara looked for love and did not fear its consequences in a society like hers. Ra f was her first love. She lives ten days with him in London, where she also lives "all that love, on whose throne their hearts squared; ten days that were cut from sadness of three decades"⁷³. Sara describes these days of passionate love saying: "I read in his eyes at that time the phrase "I love you!" All the barriers bent down; his awe fell aside, and I continued drinking and watering and discovering the thirst of my body for years during which it was looking for nothing except a real exhale that springs from the inside of a passionate lover, rather than a sexual machine that works at runtime and stops at the emptying time. "I learned about the taste of the morning kiss for the first time when he woke up beside me"⁷⁴. "I visit the Hyde Park with him as a passionate lover; I walk with him clutching his arm; I feel a wild pleasure at all the intimate images that are stored in my mind since childhood; my heartbeats echo with beats of the quiet London wind and the drizzle of the rain of passionate love".⁷⁵

She describes this kind of love as "the strongest" type of "habituation" or "living together' as this relation is called

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 70-71

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 40.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 38.

⁷²Ibid., p. 41.

⁷³Ibid., p. 30.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 18.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 22-23.

in her traditional society: "What we call "habitation" is nothing but worn ropes that we do not resort to except when we want to find excuses to our life that we practice for the others and we account for it by the word "habitation" "getting used to each other". The love that I practiced with Ra f for a whole night is stronger and bigger than the "friendly relationship of husband and wife for a quarter of a century in a home of run-down emotions, and remote feelings towards the other. These are our houses, where our couples live in suspension, and when they go out to people, they find themselves more artistic and more perfect in their roles of persuading others that they are happy, while in reality, they were not perfect in anything in their life except in practicing unhappiness".⁷⁶

The writer criticizes these marital relations in the Arab societies in her talking about love. She sees it as a relationship in which the woman is prevented from her right of love and building a marital relationship that is based on love because Love in these societies is considered a shame, a defect, a taboo, a haram, and a kufr/ an infidelity. Thus, choosing a life partner depending on love and free choice becomes something unacceptable and causes shame, while traditional marriage does not give concern about feelings and emotions, which violates the marital relationship and specifically, the sexual relationship. The relationship becomes an instrumental mechanical senseless relationship and therefore, it is killed by unhappiness. Under these circumstances, the relationship between them is called "habitation/ living together" instead of building that relationship upon love and hankering.

It seems that the writer believes that marriage is a freedom of choice and a product of love. Therefore, she sees the European relationships as a model that should be followed, and this is what she loads her heroine with in theory and in practice. She says: "in the West, there is complete freedom in marriage and it is not usually completed unless the two partners confirm that they will live together till death separates them. Commitment between them starts at the moment of taking the decision and the two sides stand in front of the priest in the church, which means that marriage is a "vow" that cannot be broken by any side no matter what happens. However, marriage in Arab societies is "merely a custom". She also sees that Western societies respect this relationship and revere it and appreciate it as a private issue and personal freedom and one of the important human rights, whether for the male or the female, whereas in a society that imposes its guardianship on the female, imposes its male tribal suppression, and does not offer her a breathing room or freedom in choosing her partner and living the experience of love. Therefore, Sara, who tried marriage, and knows the meaning of being suspended under the shadow of a man for eight years without emancipation, refuses to live without love.

The writer looks for love in her literary discourse in this way. Love is what offers the woman her feeling of being alive, and grants her value and existence. For her, love is the objective correlative for freedom and life. Sex for her is connected to love. Sara did not look for a casual sexual relationship. Love, as she sees it, "makes the woman feel that she is beautiful"; "it is enough that I look at myself to make me remember how Ra f was looking attentively at the details of my face and body with admiration and wonder"⁷⁷. When Sara fell in love, she felt she was completed by love, and during the ten days that she spent with him in London, she felt that she is 'love itself'; "she is the love that no human being knew. She herself is "love" whose sounds fill the Heaven and Earth".⁷⁸ However, she sees that "this era has no room for love"⁷⁹ in her

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 19.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 35.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 31.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 31.

strict society that forbids love and such relationships.

When the woman is in love, love becomes her homeland. Therefore, Sara feels of strong alienation when she returns to Saudi Arabia: "I do not know why I felt alienated even while I am among my people. Here, I realized another fact that you are my town, my land, my light and my air"⁸⁰. Thus, the writer emphasizes the woman's need for true love and her search for it, confirming that it is one of her rights in a society that deprives her of this love because it considers it debauchery, adultery, shame, a prohibition, and evil. Every woman who is a passionate lover is considered "a prostitute who deserves to be stoned".

For love, Sara challenges the religious taboo daringly. She says: "I do not want to read any new rounds by Mohammad al-Sharif in his battles and defense of the Islamic political regime. I don't want to read Mohammad al-Sha'rawi's reflections, in which I was looking for the things that the Wahh bi strictness robbed of our life. I am not concerned now with this topic. I will turn to A l mMustaganmi; I will approach "love"⁸¹. By saying these things, the writer shows great bravery in challenging another taboo, and Saudi society considers its touching more serious than the sex taboo. Here, the writer touches on the religious taboo and all the taboos of the Wahh bi thought, which controls the Saudi reality, which deprives the woman of a lot of rights, mainly her right "to love". She pushes her heroine to refuse to sign the papers of the religious authority, which is imposed on her by the Police of the Prevention of Vice and accuse her of accusations that she has never heard about before.

We also see Sara as a daring character when she looks for her right in love insistently and travels to London to look for it. She looked for another homeland that guarantees for her the freedom to meet and love without the accountability of a censor, and she found it a homeland that "witnesses the achievement of free dreams in London's fresh air!".⁸² There, she meets her sweetheart and has a sexual relationship with him, without showing any sign of regret, and spends with him days in which she moves freely and without any social restrictions or religious eyes that watch her.

No doubt, by introducing these issues, the writer exceeded the allowable limits and penetrated the forbidden trinity in all its pillars. By highlighting these social, religious, and political taboos in Saudi Arabia, and the conditions that the woman specifically lives in, the writer bared what is considered by her society a defect (awra) or "forbidden" or taboo, that her people keep silent about". al-Muqrin revealed and exposed what should not be revealed or spoken about. Therefore, no wonder that she was attacked for writing her novel.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Writing in this novel, which belongs to the Feminist Prison Literature, is a kind of revenge and baring, exposure, and uncovering on the public level, and emptying, purgation, and curing on the private level.

After being exposed to the experiences of Saudi women prisoners, who were tortured because of their crime of the "evil" of "forbidden" love, she discovered the psychological impact of those experiences on them when she heard their stories during her work as a journalist. These stories became a worrying incentive to her that made her scream loudly in this novel. She wrote in order to reveal, disclose, and empty what happened to her after her visit to the women's prison,

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 31.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 13.

⁸²Ibid., p. 14.

depending on the art of the novel that relies on the imaginative dimension that is derived from real experiences. She wrote in order to get rid of her charged memory with pain and to purify herself from her suffering. Besides, she dealt with the woman's issues and her daily concerns under the shadow of a male oppressive authoritarian society, whose men turn into prisoners who persecute the woman and watch her behavior and feelings.

No doubt, Samar al-Muqrin's novel constitutes a cry of protest against all the postulates and taboos that rob the woman of her rights and imprison her behind actual and metaphorical bars. She reveals the man-jailor who put himself a guardian on the women's feelings. Al-Muqrin turns her word into a weapon that exposes the mechanisms of suppression and destroys the pillars of the forbidden trinity of the taboos of sex, religion and politics. To sum up, the study introduced six questions and gave answers to them throughout the discussion in an elaborate way.

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